

Middle Tennessee State University
2002-03 Performance Funding
General Education Pilot: College BASE English/Writing

As part of the general education pilot standard of the performance funding program, Middle Tennessee State University is piloting the College BASE English/Writing subject test. Approximately 10% of the fall 2002 and spring 2003 graduating class participated in the pilot study. On selected characteristics, the sample was comparable to the total graduating student population. As displayed in Table 1, more male students were represented in the sample.

Table 1: Comparison of Sample with Total Population: Selected Characteristics

Demographic Characteristic	Sample (N=209)	Total Graduating Population (N=2,201)
Gender	Female – 55% Male – 45%	Female – 58% Male – 42%
Average Age	25	26
Average GPA	3.03	3.03

College BASE Results

The College BASE numeric scores range from 40 to 560 points. The College BASE office at University of Missouri-Columbia reports median scores for the national reference group directly to THEC each year. For both the English and Writing subject tests, MTSU students scored slightly below the median at 283 (vs. 287) and 285 (vs. 290) respectively. Although the current graduating class scored higher than the previous one in English, the average writing score continued to decline for the second consecutive year. MTSU students scored at the 48th percentile. The AY 2001-02 graduating class scored at the 41st percentile with average English and writing scores of 280 and 287 respectively.

The College BASE divides English into two clusters: reading and literature, and writing. For each of these skills, the percentages of students who achieved high, medium, and low ratings are provided in Tables 2 and 3. The reading and literature cluster consists of three skills: reading critically, reading analytically, and understanding literature. On all three skills, MTSU students scored at the same level. The greatest improvement over last year's scores was found in analytical reading—an increase from 19% to 28% scoring in the high range.

Table 2: Reading and Literature Skills

	Reading Critically		Reading Analytically		Understanding Literature	
	2001-02	2002-03	2001-02	2002-03	2001-02	2002-03
High	20%	23%	19%	28%	20%	24%
Medium	55%	56%	57%	55%	56%	53%
Low	25%	20%	24%	17%	24%	23%

The writing cluster includes three skills. Two of these skills are assessed through multiple-choice questions covering the writing process and conventions of standard written English. The other skill is assessed through a written essay. Of these three skills, MTSU students scores highest on questions regarding the writing process. However, when these skills were utilized in the writing exercise, the scores declined. As noted previously, the 'writing as a process' skill is assessed through multiple-choice questions.

Table 3: Writing Skills

	Writing as a Process		Conventions of Written English		Writing Exercise	
	2001-02	2002-03	2001-02	2002-03	2001-02	2002-03
High	19%	23%	20%	20%	1%	1%
Medium	57%	54%	67%	62%	77%	72%
Low	24%	23%	13%	18%	23%	27%

Summary

The College BASE will continue to be piloted for the remainder of the 2000-04 performance funding cycle. The preliminary results indicate that students' writing skills need to be enhanced and required throughout the baccalaureate degree program. The General Studies Committee will be challenged on how to use these findings to complement and enhance changes currently being required in the general studies curriculum.